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ABSTRACT

Researchers estimate that more than half of the nation's six million young drinkers have problems with alcohol. Of those young drinkers, some reside in rural communities and towns. Little is known about how teen drinking occurs among rural teens. A pilot study was undertaken to discover how teens in rural settings are involved with drinking. Subjects were high school seniors (N=95, ages 16-19) in a rural high school in the southeast. The study focused on teens' perceptions of their relationship with their parents and peers; various behaviors were related to that measure. Alcohol use was defined by dividing those who reported drinking alcohol from those who reported never drinking alcohol. Differences between Black and White, male and female, drinkers and non-drinkers were examined using multivariate analysis. The findings are reported for main effects and interactions, and discussion highlights questions for further research. This study suggests the need for continued research on the prevalence and incidence of teenage drinking in rural communities. (EMK)

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Parent and peer relationships among Black and White teenage drinkers and non drinkers

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Parent and peer relationships among Black and White teenage drinkers and non drinkers

Abstract

Researchers estimate that more than half of the nation's six million young drinkers have problems with alcohol. Of those young drinkers, some reside in rural communities and towns. Little is known about how teen drinking occurs among rural teens. If our society is to prevent alcohol abuse among teens, examining drinking within rural communities is an imperative. A pilot study was undertaken to discover how teens in rural settings are involved with drinking. Differences between Black and white, male and female drinkers and non drinkers were examined. Gender differences in teen attitudes toward parents and peers were noted. No differences were found between drinkers and non drinkers nor Black and White teens. This study suggests the need for continued research on the prevalence and incidence of teenage drinking in rural communities.

Parent and peer relationships among Black and White teenage drinkers and non drinkers

The American public considers alcohol consumption an adult problem, but it is estimated that more than half of the nation's six million young drinkers have problems with alcohol (Bender & Leone, 1991). While the media reports tragic stories about college binge drinking deaths and accidents, this drinking pattern has its etiology in the teen [and preteen] years. Smith (1988) argues that problem drinkers rely excessively upon alcohol to obtain reinforcers while filing to employ different behaviors. Chassin, Mann, & Sher's study (1988) suggest that alcohol use may be motivated by a desire to avoid painful states of self awareness. They concluded that adolescent drinking was predictable as a function of certain demographic variables such as self awareness, feedback failure, and an alcohol abuse family history.

Family involvement can have an effect upon teenage drinking. All too often, parents have ambivalent attitudes about a teen's drinking at home and give mixed messages about their own drinking behaviors (Beck & Lockhart, 1992). Since teen age drinking habits and drinking attitudes are developed and solidified with family systems (Kwakman, Zuiker, Schippers & de Wuffel, 1988), the way in which alcohol is used by and spoken of by parents has a strong and lasting impact upon the drinking behavior of their children (Kwakman, Schippers & de Wuffel, 1988).

As confusing as it is all ready to understand teen age drinking habits and attitudes, to consider its location, as in rural communities, complicates our understanding further. Only a select few researchers have examined teenage drinking patterns with rural communities. Cronk & Sarvela (1997) compared the prevalence of substance use among high school seniors in rural and

urban areas from 1976 through 1992. With large groups of urban and rural seniors, they found a decline in substance use from 1976 through 1992. While in 1976, urban students had greater prevalence for most substances, by 1992, rural and urban students were similar. Rural students had higher prevalence for alcohol and cigarette use. Cronk & Sarvela concluded that rural students are at risk for alcohol abuse at a rate almost equal to that of urban students.

Some regional differences in rural teenage has been explored. Swaim , Beauvis, Edwards, & Oetting (1986) studied alcohol in three rural Rocky mountain communities. They discovered significantly higher rates of alcohol and LSD use when compared with the national data and lower rates of marijuana, uppers, downers, and tranquilizers. Sarvela, Pape, Odulana, & Bajracharya (1990) studied first usage among rural southern Illinois high school students. They found use rates were similar to the national data. Rural youth appear to begin drinking earlier than their urban counterparts. Most alarming was their finding that 58% of high school seniors reported driving after drinking use or using other drugs.

Sarvela & McClendon (1987) examined early adolescent alcohol abuse in rural northern Michigan. During the early 1980's, alcohol misuse increased significantly with age. Alcohol use appeared to be well above the national average. Gender differences in drinking patterns were different from the national norms, also.

Gibbons, Wylie, Echtering & French (1986) examined patterns of abuse among rural adolescents in the middle Atlantic states. Gender and grade in school were significant predictors of alcohol us for all four dependent measures: (a) age of first drink; (b) frequency of drinking; © amount of alcohol consumed; and (d) heavy drinking index. Religiosity was a significant predictor for early age of first drink. 83% of all respondents said they had consumed alcohol while 57% had

used alcohol be the time they were 12 years of age.

Kelleher, Rickett, Hardin, Pope & Farmer (1992) compared 1600 rural, suburban, and urban youth from the Southern mid-delta region, aged 11-14 and their alcohol use. Significant differences were found in the numbers of youth who used alcohol and the patterns of use by gender. Youth from the delta drank less frequently and had less abusive patterns than did adolescents from other areas. Youth from the highland area reported alcohol abuse rates and patterns of drinking similar

to urban adolescents.

When taken together, these findings suggest the importance of examining rural drinking patterns. Of special importance is to examine gender differences in alcohol use since several studies allude to gender differences. None of the aforementioned studies examined racial group differences in rural youth. Factors such as gender and racial group membership play an important role in developing effective alcohol prevention programs.

The present study examined a pilot sample of Black and White high school seniors in a rural southeastern high school. Three hypotheses were posited. (1) There will be no differences between Black and White drinkers and non drinkers in their relationships with parents and peers. (2) There will be no differences exist between male and female students in their relationships with peers and parents. (3) Students who drink will have poorer relationships with both their parents and peers than do non drinkers.

Method

Sample

Participants were 125 high school seniors in a rural high school in the Southeast. Of those

students, 95 completed the entire survey and were included in the analysis. Participants ranged in age from 16-19 years of age. Thirteen percent (N = 35) were African American while 63% or 59 students were Caucasian. The group was almost equally split in regard to alcohol consumption with 47 (49.5%) reported drinking alcohol and 48 (50.5%) never drinking alcohol. Fifty-five were female while 38 were male. Forty-nine teens indicated they had consumed alcohol while 44 stated they had never consumed alcohol.

Procedures

Students were recruited during high school senior English and literature classes and invited to participate. Parents were sent a consent form and were asked to sign and return the form before students could participate. Teen participants signed the consent form, also, to indicate their willingness to participate in the study. All students were informed that their enrollment in and grades for their English and literature classes would be not affected by their participation in the study. Students were permitted to complete the survey during actual class time.

Instruments

The alcohol and relationship survey used for this study is a 277 item questionnaire that was developed by Hughes, Powers, & Francis (1992). The survey items represented a revision of an instrument developed as part of a the Rutgers Health Development Project (Pandina, Labouvie, & White, 1984) Permission to use and modify the alcohol instrument was obtained prior to the onset of the study. The questionnaire assessed four aspects of drinking: quantity and frequency, social context of drinking, and consequences of drinking. In addition, teens were asked questions about their perceptions of their relationships with peers (friends) and their parents.

For this study, only the relationship portion of the scale was analyzed. The relationship

sections consist of 35 parent and 35 student relationship questions, scaled on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (never true) to 5 (almost always or always true). Participants responded by indicating their degree of agreement with that statement concerning their relationship with peers and with parents.

Results

An ANOVA was performed and revealed a significant difference in respondents' attitudes toward their peer relationships (E, 1, 94 = 8.866, p. <.05.) when compared to their relationships with parents (E, 1, 94 = .706, p. <.05.). These findings were confirmed with Pillai's Trace and Wilk's Lambda (p. <.05). Using multivariate analyses, gender differences were found between respondents in their perceptions of peer and parent relationships (E, 1, 89 = 4.73, p.< .05) confirming one hypothesis of this study. There was no significant difference between drinkers and non drinkers in their perceptions of their relationships with parents or peers (E, 1, 89, = .279, p.< .05) disconfirming one of this study's hypotheses.

There was a significant interaction between race and perceptions of parent or peer relationships (E, 1, 89, = .6.31, p.< .05). Black and White teen respondents rated their relationships with their peers and parents differently. For Black students, there were no within group interactions. However, for White teens, there was a significant interaction between their evaluation of parent or peer relationships (E, 1,56 = 26.33, p.< .05). White teens rated their relationships with their parents significantly differently than their relationships with their peers whether or not they were drinkers. There was an interaction between White teens' evaluation of their parents and peers with gender, but that difference for White teens was not significant (E, 1, 56, = 3.019, p. < .05).

There was a significant difference between overall responses of Black and white teens (E, 1, 85, = 36.52, p.< 05). There was a significant interaction betwee.i gender and drinking condition (E, 1, 85, = 16.02, p.< .05). Differences between race and drinker conditions (E, 1, . 85, = 161.39, p. < .06) and race and gender (E, 1, 85, 203.37, p. <.05) were not found, but approached significant.

Discussion

These findings from this preliminary study must be viewed with extreme caution because of the small sample size. The need to replicate and extend these findings with a larger sample is an imperative. A larger sample might reveal significant race differences between Black and White teens and between drinkers and non drinkers. Gender differences may be confirmed further with future studies using a large sample. Understanding relationship patterns with parents and peers remains an important question in the quest to find effective prevention programs and support services for teens in rural areas.

An additional limitation of the present study is the fact that these respondents were high school seniors. To develop effective, early alcohol prevention programs, schools and communities must combine talents to target middle school children. A recommendation is that this study be replicated and extended with a middle school population since earlier studies have suggested that early age of first drink is an important predictor (Gibbons et. al., 1986).

This study did not analyze those questions concerning actual drinking patterns of rural teens because of its focus on relationship dimensions. Clearly, such information is essential if effective alcohol prevenion programs are to be implemented in rural schools. Future studies need to examine actual drinking patterns among rural youth. There is a methodological problem in

using the alcohol survey instrument because of its length. For use in middle school settings, it is suggested that the survey be administered in two settings on two consecutive days to manage fatigue and boredom.

Additional questions are important to know about rural teenage drinking. Among those questions are the following concerns.

- How are rural youth exposed to alcohol?
- Are rural boys and girls exposed to alcohol in different ways?
- Are there racial difference in the ways teens are exposed to alcohol?
- What is the age of such exposure?
- What factors motivate a teen or child to drink or not drink?

Regional differences are likely to exist among rural youth and their drinking patterns. The present study occurred within the Southeast. These findings may vary for Midwestern, upper plains, or western rural teens. For this reason, future studies should take place in other rural settings outside the Southeast in order to learn about the teen rural drinking fully.

American society has recognized the devastation of alcohol abuse throughout all aspects of our schools, families, community and work settings. Alcohol abuse is no longer an "urban" problem. Rather, alcohol abuse and alcoholism permeate our farms, small towns and communities. The key to reducing its lifelong devastating rests in recognizing and understanding its impact on our children and teens. Future research concerning rural teens and alcohol abuse in small communities advances our scientific and personal understanding of this tragic event.

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